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ABSTRACT

A total of 373 teachers participated in a study designed to compare the reading attitudes, awareness, and abilities of elementary school and secondary school teachers. The subjects were administered four instruments to measure their reading abilities, reading habits, perceptions of the reading process (including perceptions of their own reading ability), and attitudes toward the teaching of reading in the content areas. The results suggested that there were no differences between elementary and secondary teachers in reading habits and willingness to teach reading in the content areas. They also suggested that both groups perceived the reading process similarly. Differences were found, however, between the groups in two areas: the secondary teachers' mean scores on the reading ability instrument were higher than the scores of the elementary teachers, and the secondary teachers claimed to be good readers more often than did the elementary teachers. (FL)

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Comparing Elementary and Secondary Teachers: Reading Attitudes, Awareness, and Abilities

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Conventional wisdom and published research tend to support three general conclusions concerning elementary and secondary teachers' reading abilities and habits, their perceptions of the reading process, and also their willingness to teach reading in the content areas. First, it has been suggested that secondary teachers are more capable readers than are elementary teachers (Dahlke, 1973 and Geeslin, 1971). Further, the conclusions reached by Hawkins (1967), and Mueller, (1973) suggest that the attitudes and habits of secondary teachers toward reading are more positive than those of elementary teachers. And finally, that both secondary and elementary teachers resist the notion

of teaching reading in the content areas: the reasoning being that neither group perceives the task as their responsibility; elementary teachers because they perceive their major objective as teaching children how to read and secondary teachers because they perceive their primary task as teaching content (Rieck, 1977).

These three notions concerning teachers' reading abilities, habits, and willingness to teach reading in the content areas inspired the research question: Are elementary and secondary teachers statistically significantly different ($p<.05$) from each other in terms of (a) their reading abilities, (b) their reading habits, (c) their perception of the reading process, and (d) their attitudes toward teaching reading in the content areas.

Method

Subjects

The subjects participating in this study did so as a part of their course work for one of two required courses for Arizona State certification. The 145 secondary teachers were in a course entitled "Secondary School Reading" and class members represented the various secondary education majors such as science, social studies, art, physical education, English, and so forth. The 228 elementary teachers were members of a class directed toward the teaching of reading in the elementary school.

Materials

Four instruments were used to gather data for this study. First, in order to ascertain the subject's reading abilities, raw vocabulary

and comprehension scores of the Nelson-Denny Reading test were collected. Second, the Mikulecky Behavioral Attitude Measure (Mikulecky, 1976), was administered in order to ascertain subjects' reading habits. Third, the Burke Reading Interview (Harste & Burke, 1977) was modified by the researchers to be a paper and pencil group device measuring subjects' perception of the reading process. Responses to two questions from the instrument were used: (1) When you come to something you don't know, what do you do? and (2) Are you a good reader? Finally, the Vaughan Attitude Inventory (Vaughan, 1977) was used to ascertain attitudes toward the teaching of reading in the content areas.

Procedures

All data-gathering instruments were administered in an alternated order across a two-week period during the early part of five successive University semesters. The instruments were administered, collected, and scored by the researchers.

Analyses. Mean scores were derived for three of the four instruments. A two-way analysis of variance was then calculated with the two levels of the independent variable being elementary or secondary teachers. Separate analyses were conducted with each of the Nelson-Denny scores, the Mikulecky Behavioral Attitude Inventory score, and the Vaughan Attitude Inventory score.

The responses to the first question of the Burke inventory were categorized into five groups: (1) below the word level responses, (2) word level responses, (3) above the word level responses, (4) multiple strategy responses, and (5) inquiry responses. Responses to the

second question elicited yes, no, or fair responses from the subjects.

Chi-square was used for analysis in order to determine if the percentages used in each category were related to the level of teacher, either elementary or secondary levels.

Results and Discussion

The three mean scores for the Nelson-Denny test and the mean scores for the Mikulecky and Vaughan inventories are displayed in Table 1.

Insert Table One About Here

Analysis of variance yielded statistically significant differences for each of the Nelson-Denny sub-scores: vocabulary, $F(1,371) = 5.58$, $p < .05$; comprehension, $F(1,371) = 7.08$, $p < .01$; and total score, $F(1,371) = 7.53$, $p < .01$. However, caution should be exercised when interpreting these statistical differences; the means are very close and may not represent a meaningful difference.

None of the other analyses of variance yielded significant differences between or among the elementary and the secondary teachers. Thus, the previously reported differences between elementary and secondary teachers were not satisfactorily substantiated. It is also interesting to note that both the elementary and secondary teachers' mean scores were above average on the Vaughan Attitude Inventory (Vaughan, 1977).

The Chi-square analysis of the first Burke question yielded no significant differences, $\chi^2 = 8.10$ (4), $p < .09$. However, the Chi-

square analysis of the second question was significant, $\chi^2 = 7.60$ (2) $p < .02$. Here, 59% of the secondary teachers reported being good readers while 48% of the elementary teachers reported being good readers. In contrast, 31% of the elementary teachers reported being fair readers but only 18% of the secondary teachers reported being fair readers. The percentages of elementary and secondary teachers reporting not being good readers was close, 21% and 23% respectively. Thus, many secondary teachers perceived themselves as being good readers and fewer elementary teachers perceived themselves as good readers.

Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that there are no differences between or among the reading habits and willingness to teach reading in the content fields of elementary and secondary teachers as reflected by the Mikulecky and Vaughan inventories.

Further, the results of the first question on the Burke inventory suggest that elementary and secondary teachers perceive the reading process similarly. This result may not be surprising in light of the fact that most of the teachers in these classes were taking their first reading course. Thus, elementary and secondary teachers may begin their first reading course with similarly varied perceptions of the reading process.

Finally, statistically significant differences were found between and among the elementary and secondary teachers on two measures: first, the secondary teachers' mean scores on the Nelson-Denny Reading test were significantly higher than were the elemntary teachers', and second, the secondary teachers claimed to be good readers more often than did the

elementary teachers. These two differences may be related in one or many ways. For example, people may know when they are able to do something well and are able to report that fact. Anders and Cardell (1978) reached a similar conclusion from the results of data collected from junior high students, college students, and adults. Another explanation may be that secondary teachers have more confidence in their abilities than do elementary teachers and that confidence in one's abilities contributes to success. For whatever the reasons, teachers' perceptions of their reading abilities and their performance on a standardized test do agree. Further research on the relationship between self-perception of reading ability and reading ability seems warranted.

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Table 1

Elementary and Secondary Teachers

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations

for the Nelson-Denny test

and the Vaughan and Mikulecky Inventories

Instrument	Secondary (N=145)		Elementary (N=228)	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
ND Vocabulary	58.64	19.02	54.14	17.23
ND Comprehension	49.92	11.04	47.07	9.44
ND Total	108.56	27.26	101.21	23.81
Mikulecky	73.21	14.02	75.42	12.58
Vaughan	81.44	11.39	81.36	8.17